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### Israel's vaccination rollout shows

**OPINION** 

### the world how it is done COVID-19 will accelerate the digitalization of Asian health care

Sigal Atzmon

March 16, 2021 17:00 JST

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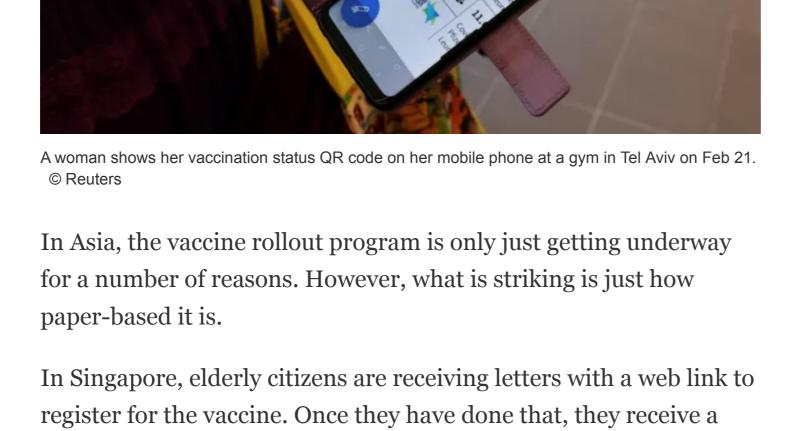
their health. But there has been a sizable gap between governments' ambitions and reality for a number of years, even in city-states with wellmanaged public health infrastructures like Hong Kong and Singapore. This is not the case in Israel where digitalization underpins the entire health care system.

When it comes to COVID-19, this is now benefiting the country in two very important ways. Firstly, Israel's vaccine program is the envy of the world. As of Mar. 14, 59.7% of the 9.3 million population had received at least one dose of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine. Secondly, the successful rollout means that Israel is confident enough to start reopening its economy again. Citizens who have had

both shots, or who have recovered from COVID-19, are eligible to

download an app developed by the Ministry of Health. This gives

them a unique QR code, which lasts for six months. Scanning it gains citizens entry to gyms, theaters, restaurants and bars. It is also helping to encourage greater vaccine take-up.



short message service with a unique booking link. In Japan, the

from mid-March.

effects.

government plans to issue vaccination tickets and then mail them

The Israeli system is far more streamlined. Citizens receive their

vaccination notifications by text. This links to an app where they

book their first and second jabs. If they do not respond to the first

text, there is an automatic escalation system, which prompts a second text, followed by a phone call. Elderly non-tech users can use a call center. The inoculation process is also digitalized. Nurses input patient data onto an app using their Smartphones, using two-factor authentication to prevent data breaches. When they return home,

Israelis receive another text linking to a survey about possible side

Israel is highly digitalized because of its strong public health ethos.

Every citizen has to join one of four medical insurance providers

known as kupot holims, Hebrew for patient funds. These cater to

every medical need from primary to tertiary care, meaning general

practitioners to specialist surgery. The four also compete for patients and digitalization helps them to stand out. Citizens use the app provided by their medical insurance providers to book appointments, message their doctor, order prescriptions, receive test results and view their medical data. Data is pooled at a national level so any authorized health care provider

can access patients' electronic health records. There is no

waste. Tests do not need to be repeated because a clinician cannot access a blood test sitting on a general practitioner's computer. This is not the case in Asia. Singapore has been progressively rolling out its National Electronic Health Record system since 2011. However, only about 27% of privately licensed doctors use it. It is a similar story in Hong Kong. As of end-February, 1.387 million of the Territory's 7.5 million population had signed up to the

government's electronic Health Record Sharing System. Studies in

enthusiasm. They are not as tech-savvy and more concerned about

both jurisdictions show that the older the doctor, the lesser the

the administrative burden of migrating data onto a new system.

Data interoperability is also an issue. This is something that

economically advanced countries and regions like Taiwan are

personalized ID system that embraces social security and tax.

around 20% of the population.

care.

Health insurance will be added this March and the government

In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a National

hopes that it will improve the card's take-up rate, which has been

speak to each other. Countries like Japan and India are at an earlier stage of the digitalization process but have ambitions for technological leapfrogs. The Japanese government wants to expand digitalization by adding more services to the My Number identification system, a

grappling with. There are a lot of legacy IT systems and they cannot

Digital Health Mission in 2020. Every Indian will be issued with a personal health ID, eventually enabling patients and practitioners to access data via an app. Countries that get their data right will benefit medically and economically. Israel now has over 20 years of data to draw on and the government uses it to craft targeted health care messages based

on age, gender and disease profiling. Medical insurance providers

suffering severe COVID-19. Israel consequently has a progressive

health care landscape emphasizing prevention and continuity of

It is also efficient. Israel spends 7.5% of its gross domestic product

on health care compared to double-digit figures in Europe's richest

countries and the U.S. Asian countries still average less than 5% of

GDP, but are rapidly scaling up as economies advance and

have even assigned patients scores based on their likelihood of

populations age. Asian governments are aware of the challenges and are meeting them head-on. I hope COVID-19 acts as an accelerator. Israel developed a COVID-19 app in a few months. It does not have to take years. Track-and-trace apps have not been popular globally because end-users do not like quarantining. Many governments also missed a trick not creating vaccine-related apps since people want jabs.

But there are still possibilities to create digital passports, as citizens

want life to get back to normal. Such apps can be a springboard for

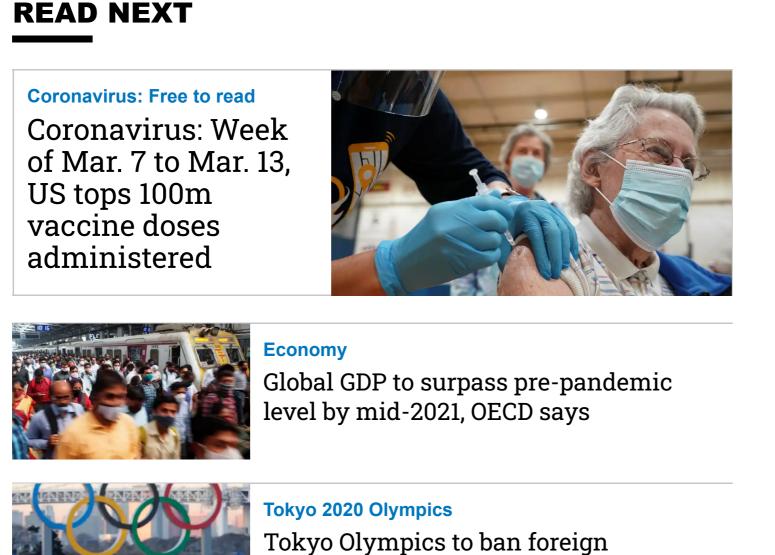
speedier digitalization. Crises create opportunities and there is no

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bigger one than COVID-19.

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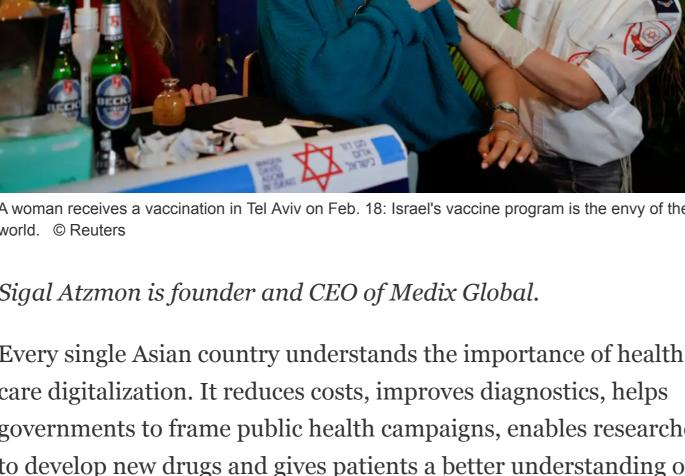
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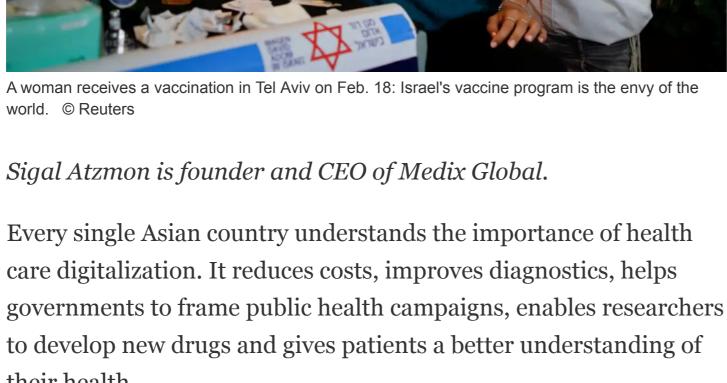
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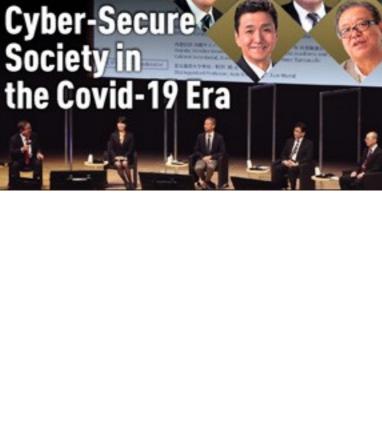
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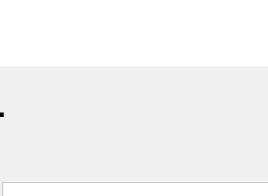
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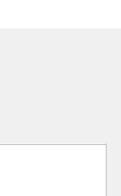
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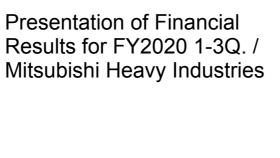


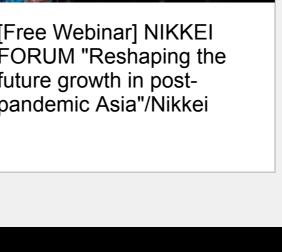
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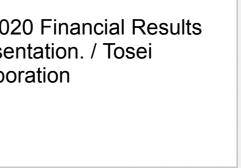
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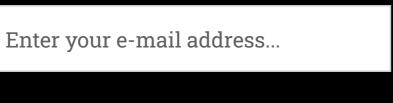












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